

"In 1885 our differences were latent or instinctive and we denounced the Capitalists as thieves and, among ourselves, talked revolution, anarchism, labour notes versus books, and all the rest of it, on the tacit assumption that the object of our campaign, with its watch-words or else, 'EDUCATE, ORGANISE,' was to bring about a tremendous smash-up of existing society, to be succeeded by complete Socialism. And this meant that we had no true practical understanding either of society or of Socialism. Without being quite definitely aware of this, we yet felt it to a certain extent all along, and it was at this period that we contracted the invaluable habit of laughing at ourselves which has always distinguished us, and which has saved us from becoming hampered by the gushing enthusiasts who mistake their own emotions for public movements. From the first, such people fled after one glance at us, and we declaimed that we were not serious. Our preference for practical criticisms, and our impatience of all general expressions of sympathy with working-class aspirations, not to mention our way of chaffing our opponents in preference to denouncing them as enemies of the human race, repelled from us some of the most eloquent Socialists, to whom it seemed callous and cynical to be even commonly self-possessed in the presence of the sufferings upon which Socialists make war. But there was far too much equality and personal intimacy among us to allow of any member presuming to get up and preach at the rest in the fashion which the working classes still tolerate submissively from their leaders. We knew that a sort of oratory was useful for 'stoking up' public meetings, but we needed no stoking up, and when any orator entered the process on us, soon made him understand that he was wasting his time and ours. I, for one, should be very sorry to lower the standard of the Fabian by making the atmosphere of its public discussions the least bit more congenial to stale

declamation
than it is at present If our debates are to be kept
wholesome,
they cannot be too irreverent or too critical And
the uu*vex~
ence, which has become traditional with us, comes
down from
those early days when we often talked such
nonsense that we
could not help laughing at ourselves}>¹

Inside the Fabian Society—whose papers
were, at one
stage, kept in a drawer in the Colonial Office
—real hard

¹ *The Fabian Society* Its Early History Tract No 41, by
Bernard Shaw